

WHAT'S NEXT – WITNESS COURSE...

In Morning Prayer this morning, the Psalm was Psalm 119 – well, at least the last few verses of that very long psalm! The closing line was *“I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost” (Ps 119:174).*

Lost sheep is a recurring theme in the Bible.

Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep leaving the 99 on the hills. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd. They come to him and follow him.

The Old Testament also uses this pastoral imagery. Ezekiel 34 prophesies against the *“shepherds of Israel”*, the religious leaders of the time, who *“only take care of themselves”*, abandoning the flock. God himself will become their shepherd, tending and saving the sheep.

In that most moving Good Friday reading from Isaiah, the prophet, when extolling the suffering servant, laments that, *“We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way” (Isa 53:6)*

This is serious stuff. It's not just about woolly farm animals with dopey faces! This is about being separated from the source of life himself – God our Creator.

And the beauty of our trinitarian faith, is that the source of all life, God our Creator, sent his only son, *“through whom all things were made” (John 1:1)* to be the shepherd of the sheep who went astray and to *“bear the iniquities of us all”*. (Isa 53:6)

The shepherd is both Creator and Saviour. Rescuer. Redeemer.

And we also know that *“Jesus wept” (John 11:35)*. He wept for the death of his friend Lazarus and he wept over the state of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44)

⁴¹ *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, **he wept over it*** ⁴² *and said, “If you, **even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.*** ⁴³ *The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”*

Jesus looks forward to the destruction of the city by the Romans in AD 70 but he also laments the lost opportunity to come back to God through him.

And if Jesus weeps for lost things and those who will not be saved, so should we.

An earlier verse in the Psalm says *“I have longed for your salvation”* (Ps 119:174).

How much is our faith a matter of longing? How much do we hunger for things of the Kingdom?

Do we weep for the lost?

In the 16th Century, Thomas Cranmer and others were quite clear that we are *“miserable offenders...and there is no health in us”* (Book of Common Prayer). Salvation was a longing, and believers were encouraged to take this very seriously.

This is literally a matter of life and death – eternally!

And here comes the Good News.

Our Redeemer lives!

And there are things we can do about it!

The technical terms are witnessing (or giving testimony) and evangelism.

They simply mean sharing good news that lost sheep will come back to the shepherd!

Evangelism is the topic for another day, but witnessing is as easy as being you. Let me explain...

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

Jesus doesn't say “may be” but “will be” witnesses!

A witness is someone who observed something and gives a statement to that effect, they testify as a witness.

Everyone who believes can be a witness.

And because it's **your** story, what **you** observed, what happened to **you**, it can come naturally to **you**, and no one can deny it, because it happened to **you**!

And everyone's story is different and persuasive in its own way because it's personal.

These are the principles of *The Witness Course* running for the first time here this month.

It's a three-session course covering:

- Our own faith foundations and how we grow
- The role of prayer and bible
- How we relate to the Good News of salvation (i.e. evangelism)
- Compiling and sharing our testimony

By the end, participants should be in a better position to articulate their own faith journey. This may equip them to share that with someone else should the opportunity arise.

Participation:

- Costs nothing
- Can help us grow in our faith
- Provides an opportunity to witness
- Allows us to be part of the commission to make disciples (and help the Shepherd bring back lost sheep) by making others curious about Jesus!

Any questions, contact me rector@sanderstead-parish.org.uk

Try it out!

See you there!

Your brother in Christ,
Doug

(PS – if you can't make it this time round, it will run again!)